

*There are different gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different ministries, but the same Lord.*

*Through the Sacrament of Baptism, we are all called to share our gifts with one another and with the world. Given the importance of this call from God, it is essential that we, as a community, do all we can to assure that the right gifts are shared in the right way, at the right time, by the right people. We fulfill our mission more effectively when we make every effort to ensure a richer, stronger, more vibrant and safer community of faith.*



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St. Philip Church



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**Responsible  
Ministry  
&**

Volunteer  
Screening  
Program

**The History of the Ontario Screening Initiative  
and the Archdiocese of Ottawa**

In 1999, the Government of Ontario initiated a project called the Ontario Screening Initiative. This Project was directed at all organizations within the Province, which work in any way with volunteers. The Government, through an organization called Volunteer Canada, the national voice for volunteerism in Canada, initiated this project in an effort to establish procedures designed to protect, as much as possible, those who are vulnerable among us.

All Church groups within the Province as well as all sports groups and other community organizations were invited to participate in this initiative. Along with the Anglican, the United, and the Unitarian Churches within the Province, the Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops agreed to participate. Thus, this project was mandated within the Archdiocese of Ottawa in 2001.

Through this initiative, we, as a church, have committed ourselves to carry out a formalized process of screening all volunteers who assist in our parishes.

All of us are only too aware of the issues that have manifest themselves in the forms of sexual abuse, assault, and misconduct. Added to this have been other forms of breach of trust such as financial mismanagement, theft, and abuses in leadership. Therefore, society has become more acutely aware of these realities and is much less tolerant of them and rightly so!

Within the Archdiocese of Ottawa, we are focusing on the idea of “Responsible Ministry”. The program has been initiated by this title to help parishioners recognize and understand the positive side of screening and the benefit to both the vulnerable and the volunteers within the communities.

At all times, our goal, which is the protection and safety of our vulnerable people, our volunteers, and our Church, will guide our intentions and actions as we fulfil this initiative in the Archdiocese of Ottawa.

## What is screening?

Screening is simply a process designed to create and maintain a safe environment.

The process is used by organizations to evaluate volunteers and to identify any activity, which by virtue of the position could put children, youth, or other vulnerable persons at risk.

A vulnerable person is one who has difficulty protecting her or himself from harm temporarily or permanently and is at risk because of age, disability, handicap, or emotional distress due to extreme crisis or trauma.

The screening process also ensures the most appropriate match is made between the person wishing to volunteer and the ministry position. This is also known as volunteer management.

## Why screen?

We screen to protect our program participants, our staff, and our volunteers. We also want to ensure that the appropriate people are assigned to the correct ministries.

Every organization has a responsibility to appropriately screen its staff and volunteers. It is not only the right thing to do but it is a legal requirement.

## From the introduction to the Archdiocese of Ottawa's Responsible Ministry Program, dated January 7, 2008

Dear Father,

In order to provide the highest possible level of safety and security to everyone involved in parish ministry, the archdiocese of Ottawa has developed a screening policy for all staff and volunteers serving in the Archdiocese. Screening is designed to create and maintain a safe environment for all. The decision to develop and implement such a policy is based on values that are of paramount importance to everyone who serves the needs of the people of God. Values such as trust, justice and accountability form the basis of this screening called *Responsible Ministry*.

The screening process assures that the most suitable match is made between volunteers and the ministries available. Screening measures are developed in order to minimize the risks to persons receiving assistance, as well as those serving in parish ministry. It is important to note that it is the nature of the ministry and the risks involved that dictate the need for screening, not the character of those involved in the ministry. Factors such as participants, activities, setting, and supervision determine the level of risk involved. For example, ministry to the sick, involving one to one interaction between a volunteer or staff member and a frail elderly person in his/her home will be designated as "high risk" ministry while an adult prayer group meeting in the parish hall can be

considered a 'low risk' activity. All parish ministries will be assigned a risk level and the appropriate screening measures for that level will be taken.

Risk management endeavours are designed to identify risks and problems which might arise and then to take steps to avoid, control, eliminate and minimize those risks for everyone concerned. Ask the critical question: what could go wrong and how could it be avoided? Even well-intentioned persons may overstep boundaries and, in doing so, cause harm to vulnerable persons.

The screening process, which was originally presented to you at Pastoral Days in February 2001, and which has been operating as a draft policy since October 2001, will become a permanent measure in the operation of our Archdiocese and all staff and volunteers who serve in the Archdiocese will become part of the process. With this letter be advised that the Responsible Ministry Program for the Archdiocese is formally promulgated effective this date. It is expected that all parishes will establish a volunteer screening committee and be actively involved in the Responsible Ministry Program.

The Policies and Procedures Manual for this program is attached\*.

Terrence Prendergast, S.J.  
Archbishop of Ottawa

\* to the program document

## The three primary goals of Responsible Ministry

1. To safeguard, in all respects, all of those to whom we minister.
2. To support parish volunteers and preserve their safety, integrity and reputation.
3. To ensure that we fulfill our duty and obligation as a faith community.

## Ten steps of screening

Screening begins before any person offers themselves for volunteering and ends only after the person leaves the ministry position. There are three parts:

### *Before selecting volunteers*

1. Determine the sensitivity (risk)
2. Ministry role descriptions
3. Recruitment process

### *The selection process*

4. Volunteer information form
5. References check †
6. Interviews ‡
7. Police record check ‡

### *Managing the volunteers*

8. Orientation and training
9. Supervision
10. Feedback/evaluation

† medium and high sensitivity roles only

‡ high sensitivity roles only